

January 13, 2017
1420 East 6th Ave.
P.O. Box 200701
Helena, MT 59620-0701

Environmental Quality Council
Montana Department of Environmental Quality
Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks
Fisheries Division
Region 3 Office
Montana State Library, Helena
MT Environmental Information Center
Montana Audubon Council
Montana Wildlife Federation
Madison Conservation District
U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Helena
State Historic Preservation Office, Helena
Madison Valley Ranch

Ladies and Gentlemen:

Enclosed is an Environmental Assessment (EA) prepared for the Future Fisheries Improvement Program (FFIP). The Program tentatively plans to provide partial funding toward a project to restore eroding banks on 1,200 feet of stream on Jack Creek, a tributary to the Madison River. The project site is on three private property holdings near the confluence with the Madison River in Madison County.

Please submit any comments by 11:59 PM on February 12, 2017 to Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks at the address listed above. The funding for this project through the FFIP is contingent upon approval being granted by the Fish & Wildlife Commission. If you have any questions, feel free to contact me at (406) 444-2432. Please note that this draft EA will be considered as final if no substantive comments are received by the deadline listed above.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Michelle McGree", followed by a horizontal line.

Michelle McGree, Program Officer
Habitat Bureau
Fisheries Division
e-mail: mmcgree@mt.gov

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

Fisheries Division
Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks
Jack Creek Riparian Restoration

General Purpose: The 1995 Montana Legislature enacted sections 87-1-272 through 273, MCA that direct Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP) to administer a Future Fisheries Improvement Program (FFIP). The program involves providing funding for physical projects to restore degraded fish habitat in rivers and lakes for the purpose of improving wild fisheries. The legislature established an earmarked funding account to help accomplish this goal. Additionally, the 1999 Montana Legislature amended statute sections 87-1-273, 15-38-202 and Section 5, Chapter 463, Laws of 1995 to create a bull trout and cutthroat trout enhancement program. This legislation was amended again in 2013 to open the program to all native fish species (statute section 87-1-283). The program now calls for the enhancement of native fish through habitat restoration, natural reproduction and reductions in species competition by way of the FFIP.

The FFIP tentatively plans to provide partial funding toward the restoration of four actively eroding bank sites on 1,200 feet of Jack Creek. The overall goal is to improve riparian and aquatic habitat by establishing a riparian plant community and reducing sediment inputs from eroding banks.

I. Location of Project:

This project will be conducted on Jack Creek, a tributary to the Madison River, located north of Jeffers, MT within Township 5S, Range 1W, Section 23 in Madison County (Figure 1). The project site is near the confluence with the Madison River.

II. Need for the Project:

One goal within FWP's Statewide Fisheries Management Plan for the fisheries management program is to "restore and enhance degraded fisheries habitats." By implementing an improvement project and creating/restoring important habitat, this proposed project would help meet this goal. The project site has been the site of active channel migration and heavy erosion. The stream was historically dynamic and experienced alterations such as channel straightening, placement of carbody bank armor, and unfavorable management practices. This project intends to reduce erosion and restore the riparian and aquatic habitat, thereby improving conditions for fish and other aquatic organisms.

III. Scope of the Project:

The project proposes to install bank treatments including a cobble toe, bankfull bench, grading of vertical banks, and revegetation. The overall goal is to reduce sediment inputs from eroding banks and improve riparian and aquatic habitat. This project is expected to cost \$110,904.85. Of this total, the FFIP would be contributing up to \$10,014.48 to complete the project. The remainder of the funds are considered matching contributions, listed below:

Contributor	In-kind services	In-kind cash
Landowner		\$12,500
Northwest Energy		\$48,000
Madison Conservation District (applicant)	\$1,000	
Volunteer	\$10,596	
Private		\$13,299.25
TOTAL MATCH: \$85,395.25		

IV. Environmental Impact Review Checklist:

Evaluation of the impacts of the Proposed Action including secondary and cumulative impacts on the Physical and Human Environment

Project Title: Jack Creek riparian restoration

Division/Bureau: Fisheries Division / Habitat Bureau (FFIP)

Description of Project: The FFIP tentatively plans to provide partial funding toward the restoration of four actively eroding bank sites on 1,200 feet of Jack Creek. The overall goal is to improve riparian and aquatic habitat by establishing a riparian plant community and reducing sediment inputs from eroding banks.

A. POTENTIAL IMPACTS TO THE PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

Will the proposed action result in potential impacts to:	Unknown	Potentially Significant	Minor	None	Can Be Mitigated	Comments Provided
1. Geology and soil quality, stability and moisture			X			X
2. Air quality or objectionable odors				X		
3. Water quality, quantity and distribution (surface or groundwater)			X			X
4. Existing water right or reservation				X		
5. Vegetation cover, quantity and quality			X			X
6. Unique, endangered, or fragile vegetative species				X		
7. Terrestrial or aquatic life and/or habitats			X			X
8. Unique, endangered, or fragile wildlife or fisheries species				X		
9. Introduction of new species into an area				X		

10. Changes to abundance or movement of species			X			X
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B. POTENTIAL IMPACTS ON THE HUMAN ENVIRONMENT

Will the proposed action result in potential impacts to:	Unknown	Potentially Significant	Minor	None	Can Be Mitigated	Comments Provided
1. Noise and/or electrical effects				X		
2. Land use				X		
3. Risk and/or health hazards				X		
4. Community impact				X		
5. Public services/taxes/utilities				X		
6. Potential revenue and/or project maintenance costs				X		
7. Aesthetics and recreation				X		
8. Cultural and historic resources				X		X
9. Evaluation of significance				X		
10. Generate public controversy				X		

V. Explanation of Impacts to the Physical Environment

1. Geology and soil quality, stability and moisture

This project is expected to improve soil stability through reduced erosion. The riparian plantings are intended to encourage root growth and hold banks together. Soil would be contained within the streambanks and would not erode into the stream. The overall impact is expected to be positive.

3. Water quantity, quality, and distribution.

No changes in streamflow would occur in Jack Creek as a result of the proposed project. However, the bank treatments may affect the edge of the stream and therefore could impact turbidity. To address turbidity, operation of equipment in the stream channel will be minimized to the extent practicable. A 318 authorization will be obtained, if necessary, to meet short-term water quality standards. Long term, the project is expected to improve water quality.

5. Vegetation cover, quantity and quality

This project would improve vegetation cover, quantity, and quality by revegetation of the stream banks and riparian area. Vegetative communities will be actively created through planting and native seeding. Increased vegetative cover should provide shade, which is considered habitat for

aquatic species.

7. Terrestrial or aquatic life and/or habitats.

This project would restore and revegetate the stream banks and riparian area on 1,200 feet of Jack Creek. Long term, the project intends to provide additional shade and reduce erosion, which should improve spawning habitat and could provide cooler water for aquatic life. Areas without accumulations of fine sediment are required for spawning as well as habitat for other organisms.

10. Changes to abundance or movement of species.

Reduced sediment and improved habitat has the potential to improve fish population abundance through improved spawning and rearing habitat. Vegetative cover can provide shade and reduce water temperature, which can have a positive impact on survival. Any changes to the abundance of fish species as a result of this project is considered positive.

VI. Explanation of Impacts to the Human Environment

8. Cultural and historic resources.

No cultural or historical resource impacts are anticipated. However, the State Historical Preservation Office will be notified of the project, and any potential concerns will be addressed.

VII. Narrative Evaluation and Comment.

There are no anticipated cumulative effects.

VIII. Discussion and Evaluation of Reasonable Alternatives.

1. No Action Alternative.

If no funding is provided through the FFIP, either the applicant would have to seek additional sources of funding to complete the project, or the affected area of Jack Creek would continue to release sediment into the stream and the aquatic habitat would not be improved.

2. The Proposed Alternative.

The proposed alternative intends to provide partial funding through the FFIP to restore Jack Creek by repairing four eroding banks (through the use of bank treatments) and revegetating the riparian area.

IX. Environmental Assessment Conclusion Section.

1. Other groups or agencies contacted or which may have overlapping jurisdiction:

Madison Conservation District

2. Evaluation and listing of mitigation, stipulation, or other control measures enforceable by the agency or another government agency:

None.

3. Is an EIS required?

No. We conclude, from this review, that the proposed activities will have an overall positive impact on the physical and human environment, and will therefore not require the extensive analysis associated with an EIS.

4. Level of public involvement.

The project application to the FFIP has been posted on the FWP webpage for public comment. No comments have been received to date. The proposed project was reviewed and supported by the public review panel of the FFIP. The proposed project also will be reviewed by the Fish & Wildlife Commission, and funding will be contingent upon their approval. The EA will be distributed to all individuals and groups listed on the cover letter and will be published on the FWP webpage: www.fwp.mt.gov.

5. Duration of comment period?

Public comment will be accepted through 11:59 PM on February 12, 2017.

6. Person(s) responsible for preparing the EA.

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FIGURE 1: project location

